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THE YOM KIPPUR WAR: INSIGHTS INTO OPERATIONAL THEORY

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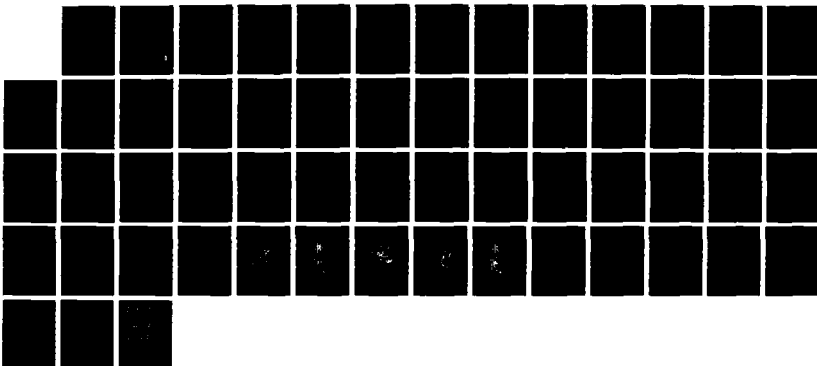
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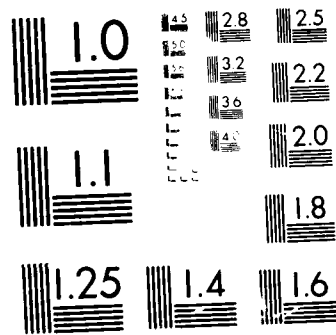
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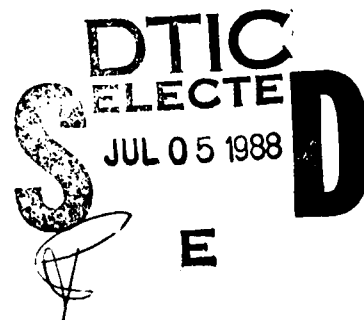
The Yom Kippur War:  
Insights Into Operational Theory

by  
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Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

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## ABSTRACT

THE YOM KIPPUR WAR: INSIGHTS INTO OPERATIONAL THEORY by MAJ Richard H. Gribling, USA, 50 pages.

In 1973, Israel found itself fighting its fifth major war against its Arab neighbors since achieving independence 25 years previously. This was a war in which both sides designed their military strategies within the framework of the political limitations set down by the two superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union. As a result, both sides attempted to design campaigns in which key engagements set the conditions for a successful political solution.

This paper begins with a broad overview of the conflict. It discusses three characteristics of the operational level of war: centers of gravity, culminating points, and the linkage of means and ends. It then analyzes how these characteristics significantly shaped the course of this war for both opponents. Finally, this study concludes that victory is only achieved by designing campaigns based on positive aims. For this war, the positive aim was defeating the opponent's source of strength.



# I

## INTRODUCTION

In 1973, Israel found itself fighting its fifth major war against its Arab neighbors since achieving independence twenty-five years previously. This was a war in which both sides designed their military strategies within the framework of the political limitations set down by the two superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union.

The loss of the Sinai as a result of the 1967 War severely embarrassed Egypt as a nation and blocked her path to becoming the leader of the Arab world. Since the 1967 defeat, Egypt felt it had gained the sympathy of many foreign governments concerning its desire to restore the territories lost six years earlier.

In large measure, the Arab strategy focused on the United States' policy toward Israel. By seizing the Israeli controlled Suez Canal and Golan Heights, Egypt and Syria would force the United States to make a choice "either of taking the long delayed action on an implicit commitment to force Israel to evacuate the Arab territories or to expose US interests in the Arab world to real danger".<sup>1</sup>

The Arab campaign plan, then, was designed as a limited offensive. Its specific goals entailed the occupation of the Golan Heights by Syria and the establishment of bridgeheads on the east side of the Suez by Egypt.

Accomplishing these goals would render two important political conditions. First, the Arab world regains its respect as a viable military presence in the Middle East. Second, the inevitable call by the superpowers to come to a negotiated peace gives all the political leverage to Syria and Egypt.

Israel also understood that it had political limitations and must operate under the benevolent influence of the United States. Although the US would

never let Israel become destroyed as a state, it would also never let Israel achieve total victory over its opponents.

The Yom Kippur War presents a recent study of limited war in which the end state was reached at the bargaining table. Both sides designed campaigns in which key engagements set the conditions for a successful political solution. This paper discusses three characteristics of the operational level of war as it applied to this conflict. These characteristics of centers of gravity, culminating points, and the linkage of means and ends significantly shaped the course of this war for both opponents. The importance of this study is understanding how these principles influenced both campaign design and the desired end state of both sides in this limited war.

## II HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) was a victim of the successes it experienced in the 1967 Sinai War. The Israeli Air Force had conducted first strikes against Arab air bases which rendered their enemies air power useless and gave the IDF air superiority over the battlefield. This air superiority resulted in complete freedom for its ground maneuver forces. However, Israel's reliance on this combination of the fighter aircraft and battle tank produced faulty lessons that would take Israel to the brink of military defeat in October, 1973.

Chaim Herzog, former President of Israel, stated that the 1967 War gave the IDF the false sense that the fighter aircraft and the tank were the predominant weapon systems for future wars.<sup>2</sup> The fighter, once it achieved air superiority, was used in support of armor units and as airborne artillery. The tank relied on its highly accurate gunnery and mobility to win the ground battle.

Added to this military unpreparedness were the differing opinions expressed by both the political and military leadership as to how Israel should defend its borders. A major concern was the expense associated with readiness. Mobilizing the entire country every time Egypt or Syria conducted military maneuvers put severe strains on the economy. In fact, Israel did mobilize the IDF in May of 1973, in a reaction to Arab maneuvers. This partial mobilization cost 11 million dollars, temporarily hurt the Israeli economy, and became a leading argument against any further over-reaction to Arab military exercises.<sup>3</sup> Balancing the Israeli economy with the decision to mobilize for war caused both the politicians and the military leaders to rely on accurate interpretations of information furnished by the intelligence community.

The security of the country was based on two risky assumptions. First, the Israeli intelligence network was capable of giving both the political and military decision makers ample warning of an Arab attack. Second, initial Israeli ground defenses, combined with the quick reacting air force, could hold off any attack until the IDF was fully mobilized.

By 1973, the majority of the Israeli intelligence community became enamored with what was termed "The Concept".<sup>4</sup> This perception was based on two predictions. First, Syria would never attack unilaterally. Second, Egypt could not attack until its air force gained enough sophistication and tactical maturity to defeat the Israeli Air Force. This second point, it was believed, could not happen for another five years.<sup>5</sup>

Since their defeat in the 1967 Sinai War, Arab nations were learning from their mistakes. Massive Soviet military aid was welcomed, in particular, by Egypt and Syria. President Anwar Sadat secured a loan from the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia that allowed him to re-equip his armed forces with ground-to-air

missiles and helicopters.<sup>6</sup> The Russians provided an air defense system on the Damascus front as well as, MIG 21s and a number of the latest T-62 tanks.<sup>7</sup>

Dealing with the Israeli Air Force was of primary importance to both the Syrians and the Egyptians. Both countries accepted Israeli dominance in the air but agreed that a sophisticated air defense screen could negate the Israeli Air Force's effectiveness on the battlefield. The air defense objective was "to deprive Israel of air supremacy by establishing a modern and strong air defense system that could paralyze the Israeli air force mainly with missiles and antiaircraft guns...."<sup>8</sup>

However, Arab solidarity became the most significant act that transpired during the rebuilding years before the war. This was not easy. The Arab countries in the Mid East had historically been self-seeking and did not trust their other Arab "brothers". Sadat knew that if there was to be any success in waging war against Israel, it would require the combined efforts of all of the Arab states bordering Israel.

In May of 1973, a border war between Palestinian refugees and Lebanese armed forces sparked a mini-civil war that had the propensity to spread to Syria. Israel feared for a general Arab-Israeli conflict and initiated a partial call-up of the IDF. Although this mobilization was later called off, it "finally persuaded [Syria] to formulate a common strategy with Egypt as the only safeguard against a possible reprisal attack from Israel."<sup>9</sup>

A series of meetings from June through September between Syria, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia resulted in reaching a new understanding.

A loosely organized joint military organization known as the Federal Armed Forces was formed a result of this summit meeting. The Egyptian General Ismail was named Commander and Chief with the chiefs of staffs of the Syrian

and Egyptian armies subordinate to him.

All of these signs were either missed or misinterpreted by Israeli intelligence. The Israeli government was blinded by their recent performance in the 1967 War, by the assurance of the experts that no combined offensive was possible by its Arab neighbors, and that an early warning of any attack could be accurately predicted.

#### A. OPENING MOVES

When the Egyptians and Syrians launched their attacks at 1400 hours, 6 October 1973, both the Israeli government and the IDF were caught up in a state of confusion. Indications that the combined Arab attack would begin on 6 October had only recently been known to the Israelis. "Somewhere along the intelligence pipeline information that the attack would take place at sunset turned into an estimate that the attack was scheduled for about 6.00 pm".<sup>10</sup> Even in the eleventh hour much of the Israeli government leadership was still debating the seriousness of the forthcoming Arab attacks. General Zeira, Israeli Intelligence Chief, had only recently admitted to the possibility that an Arab attack was likely. Meanwhile General Elazar, IDF Chief of Staff, begged the Minister of Defense, Moshe Dayan, for authorization to commence general mobilization and a pre-emptive air strike. Dayan, as well as the Prime Minister, Golda Meir, were concerned that world opinion would turn against Israel if it reacted overtly to an Arab buildup that had not yet crossed their borders. A compromise was reached "in which Elazar was authorized to mobilize 100,000 men....The prime minister accepted Dayan's stand on a pre-emptive attack and turned down Elazar's request."<sup>11</sup>

## Southern Front

There could be no doubt in the minds of the Israeli soldiers stationed on the west side of the Canal that a major attack had begun. Facing these small Israeli units was the Egyptian Second Army in the north and the Egyptian Third Army in the South. Additionally, 8,000 assault infantrymen<sup>12</sup> stormed across the Canal with the purpose of gaining an initial foothold on the east side. "At the same time, commando and infantry tank-destroyer units crossed the Canal, mined the approaches to the ramps, prepared anti-tank ambushes and lay in wait for the advancing Israeli armor".<sup>13</sup> (Map 1)

Because the IDF was surprised by this Egyptian buildup, only a small contingent of reservists, numbering 436 from the Jerusalem Brigade,<sup>14</sup> were manning a series of sixteen strongpoints along the Canal known as the Bar-Lev Line. These fortifications overwatched the Canal for 160 km and were supported by platoons of tanks that totalled only 100 for the entire defensive line.<sup>15</sup>

The commander of the Southern Front, General Gonen, faced a no win situation. He was grossly out-numbered and his only contingency plans did not meet the present reality. The first plan, labeled the Shovach Yonim Plan, required all forward deployed forces in the Sinai to move west and assume positions along the Suez Canal and engage the Egyptians as they attempted to cross.<sup>16</sup> The second plan, termed the Sela Plan, required full mobilization of tanks, infantry, artillery, engineers, combat service and additional command and control units which would supplement the forces already stationed on the front.<sup>17</sup> General Gonen, then, faced stopping the Egyptian invasion with the meager forces at hand. His initial concern was to determine the main effort before committing his armor reserve. Unfortunately, the Egyptian plan

contained no main effort. Instead, the Egyptian Army attacked along five axes with the intent of establishing multiple bridgeheads on the east side of the Canal. "By 1600 hours, it was clear to Gonen that there was no main effort, but that the crossing was more successful in the northern sector of the Canal than in the southern sector".<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately, Gonen could not do much about the enemy situation. With the easy crossing success of the Egyptians, the bridgeheads were stacking up with large quantities of tanks, trucks, and stockpiles of supplies. Although these bridgeheads provided lucrative targets for the Israeli Air Force, the effective Egyptian air defense belt made Battlefield Air Interdiction (BAI) targets costly to Israeli fighters.

The IAF's F-4 Phantoms and A-4 Skyhawks were in action within twenty-six minutes from the first reports of the Egyptian crossings. Their attempts to stop the crossing were frustrated by the new comprehensive air defense system. They were forced to fly low to stay away from the SA2s and SA3s. This put them in range of the ZSU-23-4s, SA6s,<sup>19</sup> and SA7s. The IAF losses mounted rapidly.

Also, Gonen was competing for limited air assets with the fight in the Golan Heights. The Minister of Defense, concerned with the initial successes of the Syrians, assigned the priority of the close air support role to the Northern Front.

General Elazar arrived at Gonen's command post on 7 October with a plan to launch a counterattack against those Egyptian forces on the east side of the Canal. The attack was scheduled for the next day. The plan called for General Adan's Division to conduct an attack from the north to the south using the two main roads that parallel the Suez. Unfortunately, the methodical Egyptians secured the bridgeheads by emplacing extensive antiarmor ambushes with well dug-

in infantry packing "Sagger" antitank launchers. For the Israelis this proved disastrous. Adan's division was primarily composed of armor forces. He did not have sufficient infantry or artillery units to destroy the enemy's antitank defenses.

The Israeli armor mounted what looked like old-fashioned cavalry charges, without infantry support and with inadequate artillery support. This made no sense whatever in the face of the masses of anti-tank weapons that the Egyptians had concentrated on the battlefield.<sup>20</sup>

After Adan's failed counterattack, Gonen was forced to make a reassessment of his options. Adan had lost almost half his 170 tank force.<sup>21</sup> Most of the sixteen strongpoints that overlooked the Canal had been captured by the Egyptians. Egyptian bridging operations had gone unchecked and had succeeded in establishing strong bridgeheads ten miles into the Sinai. The IDF's situation was far from satisfactory.

#### Northern Front

The disposition of Israeli and Syrian forces mirrored the circumstances on the Southern Front. Both armies had built defensive positions on their side of the 1967 cease fire line, known as the Purple Line.(Map2) By September, Israeli soldiers manning the seventeen outposts<sup>22</sup> along the line had watched a steady buildup of Syrian armor and artillery units. The Syrians had deployed three infantry divisions along the 45 mile front. These units were backed up with the Syrian 3rd Armored Division in the north and the 1st Armored Division in the center. "The total Syrian force facing Israel numbered approximately 1,500 tanks supported by some 1,000 guns, including heavy mortars and a surface-to-air missile system protecting Damascus".<sup>23</sup> Opposing these forces were two Israeli armor brigades with a total of 170 tanks and 60 artillery pieces



between them.<sup>24</sup>

The Syrian attack was synchronized with the Egyptian attack. At H-Hour, two armor thrusts were launched across the Purple Line. The first was a supporting attack from the north aimed at seizing the town of Kuneitra. The main effort was directed further south toward Rafid. Each attack relied on its armor forces to pass through a penetration made by the infantry and to drive swiftly to take the high ground east of the Jordan River.

Countering this force were two Israeli armor brigades with the mission of delaying these armor thrusts for 48 hours, thus allowing reinforcements to move north and take over the fight. The odds for a successful delaying operation, however, were small. The seventeen strongpoints along the Purple Line were each occupied by only twenty soldiers with a platoon of three tanks adding a meager anti-tank capability.<sup>25</sup>

Additionally, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) was having a difficult time trying to give close air support while attempting to avoid the effective Syrian SAMs defensive screen.

The missiles and dense anti-aircraft fire wreaked havoc. For example...an Israeli battalion commander asked for air support at first light. As the sun rose, four Skyhawks penetrated to bomb the Syrians, but as they approached their targets the tell tale smoke trails of SAMs were seen. All four planes exploded in the air in full view<sup>26</sup> of the hard pressed troops of the battalion.

The IDF was caught in a tenacious struggle with the Syrian ground forces that resulted in heavy Israeli casualties. The southern most brigade, 188th Armor, lost most of its leaders and tanks. In the north, the 7th Brigade was reduced to twenty functional tanks.<sup>27</sup> Reinforcements had been sent into the Golan piecemeal and had not yet consolidated. Also the IAF had suffered

tremendous losses in its attempts to provide close air support to the 7th and 188th Armor Brigades. After twenty-four hours of battle the situation in the Northern Front was critical for the IDF.

#### B. MAKE THE SYRIANS PAY

Early on 8 October, the IDF realized that the Syrian attack had lost its momentum. Many Syrian units, however, still occupied large sections of the Golan. Israeli military leadership saw an opportunity to take the initiative away from the enemy. A counterattack was planned to retake territory up to the Purple Line.

The IDF understood that stripping the immediate battlefield of its ADA protection was the first step in driving the Syrians back. The IDF needed some elbow room to do what it does best, conduct maneuver warfare. But gaining local air superiority had proved costly for the IAF during the first seventy-two hours of combat. "Most of the losses were sustained when Israeli jets were used in emergency 'flying artillery' sorties".<sup>28</sup>

A successful IDF ground attack depended upon the IAF thinning the Syrian ADA curtain. They believed that if the Israeli Air Force could take the fight to the Syrian homeland then it could force the Syrian political leaders into a moral dilemma. They would be faced with either regaining the initiative or pulling back to protect its major civilian population centers.

The strikes selected were sequential, with each strike paving the way for a deeper and more lucrative target. On 9 October, the Lebanese radar site at El Burak was destroyed.<sup>29</sup> This site provided early warning for Syrian interceptors. Once this radar site was destroyed, the IAF then launched deep air strikes at Damascus. "Among the first targets were Air Force headquarters

and the Ministry of Defense compound. The Israeli jets delivered their attacks from treetop height, as much to minimize losses as to impress the Syrian man in the street".<sup>30</sup>

The final blow of the Israeli air interdiction campaign was directed at Syrian port facilities. This action actually involved both the air force and the Israeli navy. The coastal cities of Latakia, Tartous, Baniyas, and the Syrian naval headquarters at Minat al Badya were brutally attacked by the IAF.<sup>31</sup> That night the Israeli navy also fired on these cities causing severe damage to the port and oil storage facilities. Additionally, the Israeli gunboats sunk a pair of Syrian vessels, as well as, three foreign flag ships.<sup>32</sup>

This Israeli strategy worked well. With the success of these deep attacks, the Syrians were forced to thin out their forward ADA screen to protect Damascus and the ports. This action allowed the IAF to concentrate both ground and air power on Syrian forces west of the Purple Line. "In preparation for the offensive, the Air Force attempted to clear the area north of Hushnizal [Hushniyal] of SAM batteries....Ninety-five aircraft attacked and by the end of the day heavy smoke was observed over fifteen batteries".<sup>33</sup>

The combination of the destruction of ADA batteries and the superior tactical maneuvering of Israeli ground forces quickly turned the tables on the Syrians. The armor divisions of Generals Laner and Peled met with great success in destroying "two Syrian brigades....Hundreds of guns, supply vehicles, armored personnel carriers, fuel vehicles, BRDM Sagger armored missile carriers, tanks and tons of ammunition..."<sup>34</sup> that were caught in what has come to be called the Hushniya Pocket.

By 10 October, the Syrians had been pushed back across the Purple Line. Now the military and political leadership began a debate as to what should be

done next in the Northern Front. Dayan, had mixed feelings about continuing with an offensive that entailed crossing the 1967 cease-fire line. He preferred to transfer units to the Southern Front to contend with the Egyptians. General Elazar, however, felt strongly that Syria should be punished severely. An attack threatening Damascus would force Syria out of the war and insure that a future union of Arab countries would be unlikely.

However, in keeping with Israel's strategic requirements, Elazar allowed that a limited offensive to bring Damascus within range of Israeli artillery was well worth some additional losses. If Syrian citizens could feel the repercussions of the war initiated by their leaders, there was reason to believe that some reasonable and responsible considerations might be given by the incumbent or a future clique when it next was confronted with its cyclical urge to destroy the Jewish state.<sup>35</sup>

Golda Meir made the final decision. Elazar had his way. The IDF crossed the Purple Line on 11 October, and continued the attack toward Damascus. Meir was cautious, however, in granting Elazar permission to continue the offensive.

A decision had been taken in Israel not to become involved in the capture of Damascus. The effect on such a move on the Arab world could be a very serious one, and its military value would at best be dubious....the Israeli Command was only too aware of the danger of being drawn with its limited forces into the wide, open spaces of Syria. When to these considerations were added the Soviet interest in security of Damascus...it was obviously not in Israel's interest to advance beyond a point from which Damascus could be threatened by Israeli artillery fire.<sup>36</sup>

The Syrian Army was like a punch drunk fighter staggering around the ring. The IDF had scored major victories with every engagement during the initial counterattacks of 9 and 10 October. The Israelis took advantage of their momentum and weighted the crossing of the Purple Line in the north.

General Eitan's newly reconstituted 7th and 188th Brigades advanced toward what was left of the Syrian Army with the battle honored 188th in the lead. Meanwhile in the south, General Laner moved his armored division along the Kuneitra-Damascus road in support of the main effort.

It was Laner's division that was suddenly challenged by two new opponents that had arrived to help Syria. On 12 October, two Iraqi brigades were seen off to the southeast threatening Laner's open right flank. The resulting tank battle was characterized by the Israelis holding dominant terrain and unleashing accurate fires that stopped all Iraqi attempts to drive Laner's troops from the field.(Map 3)

Such engagements continued through 17 October and were supplemented by the Jordanian 40th Armored Brigade which joined the fight on 16 October. Both the Jordanians and the Iraqis, however, had significant problems in coordinating any sort of counterattacks. The Israelis finally surprised both forces in a battle near the towns of Tel Maschara and Tel Antar. The results were disastrous for the Arabs. The Jordanians lost 12 tanks at Tel Maschara and withdrew.<sup>37</sup> The Iraqis found themselves fighting alone near the town of Tel Antar. "Some 60 burning Iraqi tanks dotted the plain and the slopes...dead Iraqi infantry clearly marked the line of approach in the three major attacks".<sup>38</sup>

The Israeli ground and air offensive, although limited in objective, accomplished what it intended. President Assad was feeling the heat. His army was nearly destroyed and his borders were being defended, rather ineffectively, by two other Arab neighbors. "Assad pleaded with the Egyptians to apply pressure on the Israeli forces and thus relieve his front. General Ismail Ali, The Egyptian Minister of War, promised action"<sup>39</sup> Although Assad's plea for Egyptian action was not known to IDF headquarters, this

promise by General Ismail would prove beneficial to Israels campaign plan in the Sinai.

### C. SADAT AIDS ASSAD

Sadat found himself in an unfavorable position. On the one hand, his immediate objectives had been met. First, he had succeeded in consolidating his bridgehead on the east side of the Canal with relative ease. Second, from the 9th through the 13th of October, Egyptian forces of the Second and Third Armies had parried all attempts by the IDF to break through Egyptian defenses.

On the other hand, Sadat was now facing a situation in which an ally was pleading for help. If he did not oblige, Syria would be forced out of the war. His army would be placed in the situation of fighting the combined Israeli forces of both the Northern and Southern Fronts. The big question was whether the Egyptian Army had the capability of launching a lightening attack having demonstrated only methodical plodding since securing the bridgeheads.

One overriding concern of the Egyptian war planners was the fear of their ground forces being caught by Israeli fighter aircraft. This fear drove these planners to building an extensive air defense system from the beginning. Now, with the Syrian Army on the ropes, this over-reliance on ADA protection caused doubt with some of the Egyptian military leadership. Was the Egyptian Army capable of launching quick armor attacks without the protection of their ADA?

Among the most vocal critics of this plan was the Egyptian Chief of Staff, General Shazli. Upon hearing about the commitment of the reserve he summed up the enemy situation as follows: "The enemy air force is still too strong to be challenged by our own. And we do not have sufficient mobile SAM units to provide air cover".<sup>40</sup> Sadat's hand was forced. He was getting pressure

from the Syrian government to provide assistance. Further, there were allegations that Sadat was content to let Assad suffer while the Egyptian Army sat on its recent victories. Sadat felt obligated and thus gave General Ismail his orders to initiate a new offensive to relieve Israeli pressure on the Syrian front.

The Israeli leadership also had differing opinions on how the next stage of the campaign should be fought. The Israelis had developed a plan to conduct a crossing of the Suez prior to the start of the war. This idea of sending an armor column to the west side of the Canal was reasserting itself after the IDF regained its balance from the initial 6 October attack. In fact, from 9 October through 13 October, the IDF and Egyptian armies had both settled into a stalemate. It was the Israeli counterattack of the Syrians across the Purple Line on 11 October, that stimulated planning once again for a deep attack across the Suez.

General Bar-Lev, who now was overseeing the Southern Front, pushed for an immediate crossing. This view was shared by the Air Force Commander, General Peled, who was taking steady losses and felt that waiting would only exacerbate the problem. To counter these optimistic views was General Tal, Deputy Chief of Staff, who strongly opposed the crossing. He feared it would prove too costly in tanks and lives.<sup>41</sup>

General Elazar, Army Chief of Staff, realized that the opportunity for a deep attack across the Suez depended upon Egypt committing its strategic reserves (4th and 21st Armored Divisions) that presently languished on the west side. In his mind, the IDF must first destroy these units before it could attempt a crossing. "[He] decided to postpone the crossing until after the main armored battle, in which the Israeli forces would attempt to destroy the maximum number of Egyptian tanks and draw into the bridgeheads from the west

bank as much Egyptian armor as possible".<sup>42</sup>

Luck was with Elazar. As the Israeli leaders debated the pros and cons of their counterattack, the Egyptians launched their offensive at 0620 hours, 14 October. Elazar guessed that the enemy attack would be directed toward seizing the Mitla, Gidi, and Refidim Passes and deployed his forces accordingly. However, to his surprise, the attack was executed in an odd fashion.

At about 0700 hours tanks and infantry of the first operational echelon advanced in support of the breakthrough effort by armor of the second-echelon forces. But instead of concentrated attacks, they tried to break through in brigade strength at nine separate points along the front line.<sup>43</sup>

Although the IDF leaders were baffled by the Egyptian configuration of its forces, to the Egyptian mind this followed their deliberate strategy. General Ismail had launched the attack only to relieve pressure from the Syrian front. Seizing the mountain passes was a secondary objective. Ismail was still concerned with strengthening the Egyptian bridgehead. He stated this argument in an interview after the war when he said:

Yet, we had to launch a wide-front offensive before the suitable moment. Our object in doing so was to relieve pressure on Syria... and when I felt that we had succeeded in forcing the enemy to withdraw some of his forces from the Syrian front....I preferred going back to the bridgeheads to proceed with their consolidation....<sup>44</sup>

This piecemealing of forces on the part of the Egyptians allowed the IDF to remain in good defensive positions and engage the attacking columns at a more equal combat ratio. Additionally, now that the Israelis had pushed back the Syrians, they were able to divert some of their forces from the Golan to



the Sinai. Also, as the Egyptians moved further east, away from their protective ADA umbrella, the Israeli Air Force had opportunities to engage enemy tanks with little fear from ground-to-air missile retaliation.

The ensuing battle lasted only one day. As a result of poor tactical application of its armor forces, the Egyptians lost 264 tanks and over 1000 casualties.<sup>45</sup> Israeli losses were ten tanks.<sup>46</sup>

#### D. EGYPTS FINAL GASP

The Israeli opportunity to cross the Canal was finally at hand. The Egyptian 4th and 21st Armored Divisions had been badly mauled and were back behind the Egyptian bridgeheads licking their wounds. The crossing site selected had been prepared prior to the war by General Sharon, then commander of the Southern Front. Its location was ideal for two reasons. First, it was located near the Israeli fortification of Matzmed with the north tip of the Great Bitter Lake securing its left flank. Second, this site, by chance, was positioned along the boundary between the Egyptian Second and Third Armies. (Map 4)

General Elazar believed that a successful crossing operation offered the most operationally decisive method of bringing about the surrender of both of these armies. On 14 October, Elazar told the Israeli Cabinet that "the crossing could definitely give the Israeli forces a limited advantage in improving their position along the Canal. Should it be very successful however it could...even result in a major collapse of the Egyptian Army...."<sup>47</sup>

The IDF realized that speed of execution was most important and thus launched its attack to seize a bridgehead at 0135 hours on 16 October. By 0800 hours, one paratroop brigade had secured a bridgehead "extending three

miles northwards from the Great Bitter Lake".<sup>48</sup>

However, this early success did not last. The friction of war caused considerable command and control problems which critically threatened the success of the plan. Inadequate traffic management of the approach roads leading to the crossing site caused numerous delays. Also, the number of Egyptian units still capable of defending portions of the east side of the Canal were plentiful. In particular, elements of the Egyptian 21st Armored Division and 25th Armored Brigade threatened the lines of operation that supported the crossing.

The key to controlling the Israeli supply lines was the area known as the Chinese Farm. Convoys could not pass as long as the Egyptians held this critical piece of terrain sitting astride the main supply route: the Tirtur-Akavish road. The battle for control of the Chinese Farm was critical to the success of the crossing. What is more, both sides knew of its importance. "The problem of the Chinese Farm hung like a black cloud over the Israeli Command, which was only too aware of the fact that, unless the lines of communication on the east bank were secured, the entire operation would be doomed".<sup>49</sup>

Fighting on the east side for control of the approaches to the Israeli crossing site was costly for both sides. Israel, however, surfaced as the victor. The Egyptian losses in tanks were heavy. Eighty-six T-62 tanks out of ninety-six had been destroyed.<sup>50</sup> All of the Egyptian armored personnel carriers and supply trains were destroyed as well.<sup>51</sup> The next day, 13 October, the last resistance died as a brigade from Sharon's division finally took the Chinese Farm. This area was a picture of devastation. To Israeli commanders, this spot on the map informally became known as the "valley of death".<sup>52</sup>

Once the approaches to the crossing site had been secured east of the Canal, General Bar-Lev, ordered three division commanders to cross with the remainder of their units. Their mission was to seek out and destroy enemy formations, emphasizing air defense positions. Sharon proceeded to drive north to Ismaila. Adan swung south towards the Geneifa Hills and Magen pushed west and then south, covering Adan's right flank. (Map 5)

During these attacks the operational combinations of ground and air components took a slightly different approach as compared to their use in the Golan. Bar-Lev used his ground forces to seize and destroy Egyptian ADA sites so that the IAF could gain air superiority. This allowed the ground units to maneuver unhindered on the west side of the Suez. "The Israelis enjoyed complete mastery of the air now that the surface-to-air missile danger had...been removed by the destruction of the sites, so the Israeli Air Force were able to knock out tanks blocking the advance".<sup>53</sup>

The Israelis were back fighting their kind of war. With virtual air superiority, the IDF ground units were free to maneuver all along the west bank destroying everything in its wake and causing panic within the Egyptian high command. "Convoys found themselves ambushed. Rear headquarters, guard units, and most damagingly, SAM batteries found themselves under sudden fire without the faintest idea what was going on".<sup>54</sup>

An important factor that attributed to the IDF's success along the west bank was the infighting at Egyptian Army Headquarters. General Shazli had become more and more vocal over the situation on the west side of the Canal. He kept insisting to Sadat and Ismail that armor units were needed on the west side to counter what appeared to be an attempt to encircle the Egyptian Second and Third Armies. Sadat, however, was adamant about maintaining his hold on the east bank. When Shazli persisted, Sadat lost his temper and officially

relieved him as Chief of Staff on 17 October.<sup>55</sup> From this point it was clear to the Egyptian General Staff that any recommendation for displacement of troops to the west bank would not be discussed. All hope for a last chance at victory was lost.

Although the Egyptian General Staff was in turmoil, their soldiers of the Egyptian Second Army were putting up stiff resistance. This presented problems for Sharon's division as he fought his way north to Ismaila. Additionally, the eastern approach to the Canal was again being threatened by Egyptian forces located in a pocket called "Missouri".<sup>56</sup> Because of this resistance, Bar-Lev gave responsibility of the main effort to Adan and instructed him to drive south and encircle the Egyptian Third Army. Sharon was tasked to clean up "Missouri" and fix the Egyptian Second Army from the west side of the Canal.

This decision to redirect the main effort south was a wise one. Egyptian resistance in the south was minimal. Adan seized the Geneifa Heights and cleared it of the last SAM sites that had hindered his close air support aircraft. He next drove east toward the Little Bitter Lake in order to cut the Third Army's main supply lines and logistical base. The evening of 22 October, "found the Egyptian Third Army with its main supply lines cut, with thousands of troops fleeing in disorder, with entire formations and units cut off and with the forces in the bridgehead ...in considerable danger".<sup>57</sup>

Since 20 October, both the United States and the Soviet Union had intervened and were trying to get an agreement for a cease-fire. Israel, however, was on the offensive and out to achieve as much political advantage as she could before the inevitable pressure of the super powers forced her to stop. Conversely, Sadat was anxious to consolidate his limited gains on the east bank. He hoped that Soviet threats of military intervention would halt the Israeli advance. What resulted was a race by Israel. If she could

completely encircle the Third Army and seize the town of Suez, she would have sufficient political leverage for the eventual bargaining that would follow.

The first agreed upon cease-fire was to begin at 1852 hours, 22 October. Both Egypt and Israel claimed cease-fire violations. As a result, Gonen ordered Adan and Magen to continue their attack south to seize the town of Suez and tighten their hold on the Third Army. The drive south rendered more destruction and Egyptian prisoners by these two divisions. Magen was successful in taking the port of Adabiah on the Gulf of Suez the next day. Adan, however, met with stiff resistance along the main road to Suez. His hurried attack into the town was a failure. With his nose bloodied, Adan reorganized his forces and prepared for a deliberate attack that would put the full force of his division against the town.

US political pressure saved the town of Suez from receiving a severe beating. "Kissenger exerted pressure on Israel through the Israeli Ambassador in Washington, and on the 24th, a second Security Council Resolution was passed, again calling for a cease-fire".<sup>58</sup>

### III OPERATIONAL LESSONS

The 1973 Yom Kippur War was an example of limited war. Both sides designed campaign plans that involved achieving limited military aims that gained the most political advantage. As a consequence, each side applied the operational art differently when formulating their plans. Three important operational concepts surfaced during this conflict that provide insights into the successes and failures of each nation's campaign planning. These concepts are: centers of gravity, culminating points, and the linkage between means and ends. The following discussion elaborates on the relationship these principles have on campaign design in the framework of limited war.

## A. Center of Gravity

...a certain center of gravity develops, the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends. That is the point against which<sup>59</sup> all our energies should be directed.

### Arab Perspective

After the 1967 Sinai War, Egypt and Syria realized that they did not have the military might to completely destroy Israel. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) were proven masters in maneuver warfare. They also possessed an air force that could not be matched in either air-to-air combat or close air support. As a result, the nations devised campaign plans which countered these strengths. Arab strength lay in its overwhelming numbers of infantry and armor forces. Israel, with its small population, could not compete against such large numbers. An Arab limited offensive, that was capable of establishing strong lodgements, would place the IDF in the predicament of fighting a war of attrition. This was the only kind of war Egypt and Syria believed they could win.

The only kind of war in which Egypt might expect both to retain the initiative and to draw the Israelis to a war of attrition would be to cross the Canal in force and establish a large enough bridgehead to pose a permanent threat....the offensive must be launched from two fronts-from the Suez Canal in the south and also from<sup>60</sup> the eastern front...from Syria or Jordan.

In the Arab view this plan made perfect sense. Syria had massive mechanized and armor forces while Egypt relied on its straight-leg infantry. These were the Arab centers of gravity. To prevent the destruction of these

lodgements by the IAF, an extensive air defense umbrella was established. This campaign design would force the IDF to flail itself against these defenses in an attempt to dislodge them from the Israeli homeland. The key to their plan, then, focused Arab centers of gravity on defending terrain and not on destroying the enemy. Consequently, protecting the "hub of all power" through an extensive air defense screen became a critical component to Arab success.

### Israeli Perspective

Because of the overwhelming victory in 1967, Israeli leadership in the country became overconfident. The tank and fighter aircraft were the predominant weapons in the Israeli army. Little attention was given to expanding the numbers of infantry and artillery units.

Additionally, the Israeli Intelligence Service guaranteed sufficient notice in the event of a potential Arab attack. The intelligence system acted as Israel's defensive "shield" from which the Israeli Air Force (IAF) was sent against its enemies in "well directed blows". In past wars the IDF accurately detected the time of the enemy's attack. It then conducted pre-emptive air strikes on enemy air bases gaining immediate air superiority. Once air supremacy was achieved, Israeli ground forces, in conjunction with the IAF, finished off the unprotected Arab ground forces. The key to the IDF's success was gaining immediate air supremacy. This was Israel's center of gravity.

On 6 October, 1973, however, the old lessons proved disastrous for the IDF. Israeli military leaders found out too late that a combined Arab attack was imminent. Their forward outposts were occupied by understrength units. To make matters worse, Golda Meir denied a request from her military chief of staff to launch pre-emptive air strikes on Egyptian and Syrian air bases and

troop assembly areas. Israel's "hub of all power" was not allowed to respond. With pre-emption no longer an option, Israeli ground forces were left to bare the brunt of a two front war.

The IDF misjudged their enemies' centers of gravity. The Arabs had accurately assessed Israeli strengths and weaknesses and tailored their plans accordingly. An extensive SAM missile screen covered both fronts and kept the IAF from achieving success in its close air support role. It also protected the Egyptian and Syrian centers of gravity.

In the Golan, fighting was primarily between tank units. Syrian armored units, covered by their SAM belt, succeeded in breaking through to the Jordan River. The IAF was losing far too many aircraft in the main battle area. Consequently, Israeli ground units were forced to fight without their traditional "aerial" artillery.

In the Sinai, Egyptian infantrymen, packing Sagger antitank rockets, dug in along the east side of the Canal and chewed up Israeli tanks caught without their own infantry support. The IDF had misread the Egyptian center of gravity and was losing large numbers of tanks. The Israeli Southern Command failed to concentrate its forces for selective counterattacks. Rather, it conducted decentralized and indiscriminate attacks that were easily destroyed by the overwhelming numbers of Sagger-carrying infantrymen. Israel's defensive shield was cracking and its use of "well directed blows" against its enemies was ineffective.

#### Changing Conditions Effect Centers of Gravity

It looked like victory was within Arab grasp. A series of events, however, caused the IDF to take control of the war. These events underscored



the principle that warfare is never stagnant but presents constantly changing conditions which effect the centers of gravity on both sides.

In the Northern Front, the IDF caused the Syrian offensive to stall. A combination of superb defensive positions and deep air strikes directed against Damascus, forced the Syrian high command to thin out its SAM missile screen. This allowed the IDF to concentrate its ground and air arms against those Syrian armored columns caught beyond their air defense umbrella. Israeli planners succeeded in using the indirect approach to get at the Syrian center of gravity. Conversely, the Syrians failed to direct their own source of strength at Israeli ground units on the Golan Heights. Instead they were satisfied with consolidating their territorial gains. Clausewitz warns against an army that fails to focus on attacking the enemy's center of gravity when he writes, "It follows...that a strategic attack with a limited objective is...far more burdened than if it is aimed at the heart of the enemy's power".<sup>61</sup>

Likewise, in the Southern Front, the IDF took advantage of the deployment of the Egyptian strategic reserve. Israeli military leaders waited to see when the Egyptian 4th and 21st Armored Divisions would cross to the east bank of the Suez. The crossing took place and advanced toward the Gidi and Mitla Passes, without any air defense protection. Here again, the indirect approach was used to set conditions that would threaten the Egyptian center of gravity. Israeli units deliberately pulled back to allow these two divisions to drive deeper into their territory and further away from their SAM missile protection. A thousand Egyptian tanks rumbled toward the passes. Waiting in ambush were Israeli armored units in well prepared defensive positions. The resulting battle decimated these two divisions and set the conditions for an Israeli crossing to the west bank.

However, Israeli military leaders realized that destroying Egypt's strategic reserve still did not directly affect the Egyptian center of gravity that secured the bridgeheads. Further, these bridgeheads remained strongly defensible from any attack from the east. A deep attack, however, aimed at encircling both bridgeheads from the west side would threaten their security.

The result was a successful crossing by three Israeli divisions. Once across, SAM sites affording protection to Egyptian units securing the bridgeheads were destroyed. This maneuver was significant because it exemplified how the IDF continually focused its operations on attacking the Egyptian center of gravity.

By comparison, the Arab campaign plan lost sight of the importance of attacking the Israeli center of gravity. Instead, both the Egyptians and Syrians used their sources of strength to occupy key terrain. Protecting these centers of gravity became the only Arab concern. Consequently, the Israeli center of gravity (IAF) retained freedom of action on the battlefield. This allowed the IDF to exert its strength in ever increasing blows against the enemy's forces. The result was the eventual disintegration of Egyptian and Syrian centers of gravity. FM 100-5, aptly underscores this Arab failure: "Identification of the enemy's center of gravity and the design of actions which will ultimately expose it to attack and destruction while protecting our own, are the essence of the operational art".<sup>62</sup>

#### B. Culminating Point

...the attack is not a homogeneous whole:  
it is perpetually combined with defense.  
The difference between the two is that one  
cannot think of defense without the necessary  
component of the concept, the counterattack.<sup>63</sup>

Both the Syrian and Egyptian campaign plans failed to consider the effects of culmination accurately. In the Northern Front, the Syrians planned a lightning attack to seize the entire Golan Heights in the first seventy-two hours of the war. Once accomplished, SAM missile batteries would be moved up to cover the Golan territory while the Syrians dug in and waited for the Israeli counterattack. With the Syrian defense a success, a limited attack was planned "into Galilee with the primary object of cutting off the area of the 'finger' of eastern Galilee".<sup>64</sup>

Similarly, in the Southern Front, the Egyptians were to cross the Suez quickly and establish multiple bridgeheads. These initial positions would be developed into substantial lodgements protected by an ADA curtain.

#### Syrian Culmination

After thirty-four hours of battle, the Syrian First Armored Division was ten minutes from the Jordan River. Unfortunately, these gains resulted in only momentary success. The Syrians were stopped by an Israeli armored column. Although Syrian units had broken through the Israeli positions all along the Golan, the Syrian High Command could not consolidate its gains rapidly enough. Their offensive quickly degenerated into small unit actions in which the Israeli forces took full advantage. In the next forty-eight hours the IDF was able to take the initiative and begin pushing the Syrians back across the cease-fire line.

This Syrian defeat suggests a major flaw in the original plan which directly influenced an early culmination to the offensive. The Syrian goal of seizing the entire Golan Heights was too large a task for its forces. Clausewitz cautions against attempting to achieve unrealistic objectives.

It is therefore important to calculate this point correctly when planning a campaign. An attacker may otherwise take on more than he can manage and, as a it were, get into debt; a defender must be able to recognize this error...and exploit it to the full.<sup>65</sup>

The Israeli defenses along the Golan covered roughly 42 miles, from Mount Hermon in the north to the Riqqad escarpment in the south. Although the Golan lacked depth, it offered Israeli tankers the ability to range their guns across a vast open plain. The approaches to the Golan favored the Israelis, who had added to the natural ruggedness of the terrain by building tank ditches and emplacing minefields.

The Syrians executed a set-piece Russian breakthrough operation with their two armored divisions. Unfortunately, these two divisions were required to travel 30 miles to make the penetration through the Israeli lines. At the point of penetration, these units had already received many losses. Additionally, Israeli ground reserves, in conjunction with the IAF, were able to blunt the penetration; resulting in the famous Battle of the Hushniya Pocket. Unable to receive adequate protection from its air defense screen, these Syrian armored divisions quickly lost their momentum and were forced to retreat. What the Syrians failed to calculate was the battlefield dynamics that occurs during the attack. The attacker will lose combat strength as his attack continues. Even when experiencing success, his ability to influence the enemy weakens. Without pausing to refit, rearm, or resupply, the attacker reaches his culminating point resulting in less combat strength than the defender.

### Egyptian Culmination

Operations on the Southern Front offered different conditions when assessing the culminating point. After the Egyptians had established bridgeheads on the east bank, the next six days were a sparring match between the Egyptians and the Israelis. No real territorial gains were achieved by either side. Both opponents had reached operational pauses.

Conditions changed however. With the success of the Israeli counteroffensive in the Golan Heights, some needed armor units were diverted to the Southern Front. This allowed the IDF to strengthen its defensive positions in the face-off against the Egyptian bridgeheads. Likewise, the Egyptian strategic reserve was about to be committed to take the pressure off of Syria.

It was this decision that caused the tables to turn in favor of the Israelis. The IDF took advantage of this situation hoping to force the Egyptians to culminate before reaching their objective. The Israelis were sure that the Egyptians would attack to seize the Mitla and Gidi passes. The Egyptians, however, failed to concentrate their armor forces. Instead, General Ismail intended to launch a limited attack directed at the Israeli defenses with the hope of draining IDF units from the Golan. Once IDF units had been redirected to the Sinai, Ismail intended to return his forces to the bridgeheads.

This strategy doomed the Egyptians to failure. Already these armor units would be attacking without sufficient ADA protection. Concentrating its armor in the attack was Egypt's only chance for success. This it failed to do with disastrous results.

The Israelis took advantage of this situation and waited for these armored

divisions to attack deep into the Sinai and out from under their air defense cover. The Egyptian reserve launched its attack at nine different points along the IDF's defensive line. This approach enabled the IDF to face only brigade sized tank units. This broad front offensive forced the Egyptian attack to culminate quickly. The IDF destroyed much of the Egyptian reserve which set the conditions for the IDF to switch from the defense to the counterattack.

Once operations begin, the attacking commander must sense when he has reached or is about to reach his culminating point....For his part, the defender must be alert to recognize when his opponent has become overextended and be prepared to pass over to the counteroffensive before the attacker is able to recover his strength.<sup>66</sup>

#### C. Linkage of Means and Ends

The obvious answer is that superior strength is not the end but only the means. The end is either to bring the enemy to his knees or at least to deprive him of some of his territory--the point in that case being...to improve one's general prospects in the war and in the peace negotiations.<sup>67</sup>

Both the Arabs and Israelis understood that the political arena they fought in would never result in total military defeat. Eventual superpower intervention was a certainty. As a result, both nations developed warfighting strategies that focused on winning limited military objectives that would produce the best conditions for a political solution.

The political purpose of Egypt and Syria was to strike two heavy blows against Israel....to force the hands of the super-powers and oblige them to pressurize Israel to return to the 1967 borders....<sup>68</sup>

Conversely, the Israelis attempted to avoid war. Politically, they felt public opinion would turn against them if they attempted any pre-emptive strikes against the Arabs unless war was imminent.

Thus, the aims were to avoid war if possible by deterrence; to prevent the Arabs from gaining any territorial advantage in the initial attack; to gain and maintain the upper hand in the air by destroying the Arab missile system; to destroy Arab forces; and to capture territory for use as a political bargaining factor.

The politics of both nations suggest strategies that focused on different aims. The Arabs were intent on seizing key terrain and then holding it against expected Israeli counterattacks. Initially, taking territory implied a positive aim. Ultimately, however, their intentions were bent on a war of attrition which reflected an overall strategy with a negative aim. Likewise, the Israeli strategy encompassed a similar duality of aims. Defense of the Golan Heights and the Suez Canal represented an initial acquiescence toward negative aims. However, this defensive plan was only the first stage in an overall positive strategy that required territorial gains and the destruction of enemy forces as the final step to achieving victory. Time became the common denominator for both opponents. To the Arabs, the longer the IDF could fight, the weaker it became. "Thus the negative aim, which lies at the heart of pure resistance, is also the natural formula for outlasting the enemy, for wearing him down".<sup>70</sup> Conversely, the IDF viewed time as a hindrance. It was essential that Israel achieve quick and decisive military victories.

#### Positive Aims

The Israeli policy of striking first to destroy enemy forces was the strategy it used as it emerged victorious from the 1967 War. Unfortunately, the IDF failed to maintain its vigilance over its enemies. While Israel was congratulating itself on soundly beating its Arab neighbors, its neighbors were busily restructuring their armies and preparing for the next war. This surprise cost the IDF the loss of its first strike option which strained an army built around the operational and tactical offensive.

The resulting attack on 6 October, therefore, caught the IDF in the worst of configurations. IDF units on the front line were forced to make a tenuous stand while the rest of the country began general mobilization. This was not easy for an army that believed from its successes in the 1967 Sinai War, that the tank and the fighter aircraft were all that was needed to win against Arab armies. For three days the IDF experienced tremendous casualties due to its lack of infantry and artillery support. Armor units which relied on speed and cunning to achieve quick victories were caught in anti-armor ambushes set by hidden infantrymen. The Israeli Air Force also rebounded from the realization that it could not evade the large numbers of SAMs and ZSU 23-4s that protected enemy armor formations. It was clear that adjustments in Israeli tactics had to be made quickly or defeat was certain.

Initially, the Arab strategy worked. Israeli forces could not sustain their initial losses in both men and equipment. Time was on the side of the Arabs. Therefore, every IDF engagement must result in victory. Further, every victory must set the conditions for the next engagement. Only in this way could Israel win the war. Defeating Syria became the first task because it presented the most immediate threat. Once Syria was beaten, Israel could redirect its military might against Egypt.

All recent attempts, however, were costly in men, tanks, and aircraft.



Israel decided that the success of its ground force would require the thinning of the ADA screen which protected Syrian forces east of the Purple Line. Finally, the IAF found that launching deep attacks at Damascus would force the Syrian government to pull some of its air defense systems back to protect the capital. This reaction would provide the conditions needed for the IDF to gain the advantage in the main battle area west of the Purple Line. "The decision to bomb important targets throughout Syria was...an Israeli attempt to force the Syrians to dilute their air defenses over the battlefield...."<sup>71</sup>

The deep strikes against Damascus worked well. Once the Purple Line was reestablished, a limited offensive east of the cease-fire line was initiated. The intent of this offensive was to bring Damascus under Israeli artillery range. Israeli leaders, however, were careful not to attempt an all out offensive against the Syrians. Taking the capital of Damascus would be too time consuming and might energize Arab solidarity. Instead, a limited offensive toward the Syrian capital could force the Syrian army to collapse. This can be interpreted as assigning positive aims to an offensive within the framework of limited war. Clausewitz acknowledges this characteristic when he writes:

When we attack the enemy, it is one thing if we mean our first operation to be followed by others until all resistance has been broken; it is quite another if our aim is only to obtain a single victory, in order to make the enemy insecure....If that is the extent of our aim, we will employ no more strength than is absolutely necessary.<sup>72</sup>

The fact that Israel had no intention of seizing Damascus underlines Israel's political sensitivity to assigning military objectives that are compatible with their strategic goals.

## Negative Aims

Both Egypt and Syria made two mistakes in their conduct of the war. The first mistake involved the military aims of their campaign. Both countries planned limited offensives oriented on retaking Arab territories lost in the 1967 War. Although Syria entertained notions of eventually continuing their offensive across the Jordan River, neither country expected to achieve a complete military victory beyond the occupation of these lost territories. Instead, both states were relying on the Soviet Union and the United States to intervene shortly after the war started. These Arab nations expected to consolidate their territorial gains and begin negotiations from this new found position of political strength.

Unfortunately, there was no single objective in their campaign design. After the first seventy-two hours of battle the Syrians ceased to be a coherent force in the north and the Egyptians were content to consolidate their bridgeheads in the south. The general Arab offensive dissolved into two independent operations which allowed the IDF to fight each army one at a time.

The second mistake was made by President Sadat. For the previous five days General Bar-Lev was caught in a stalemate along the Canal. The Egyptians had established strong bridgeheads that the IDF were unable to penetrate. But, because of Israel's decision to take Syria out of the war first, President Assad felt threatened with immediate destruction of his army and capital. Assad pleaded with Sadat to take the pressure off the Northern Front. Sadat felt obliged to assist his comrade and thus committed his strategic reserve to a limited attack. However, he risked placing his forces outside their ADA umbrella. This action proved lucrative for the IDF and fatal for the Egyptians.

Again time became the major factor for the Israelis. The last five days of battle demonstrated that the old tactics of 1967, were not capable of dislodging the Egyptian bridgeheads. However, allowing the Egyptians to remain on the east side of the Canal would not give Israel much of a bargaining advantage once the superpowers became involved.

The one solution that would render the Egyptian hold on the east bank useless was the planned crossing of the Canal by an armored force bent on encirclement of the bridgeheads from the west bank. This daring plan, however, could only succeed if the Egyptian armored reserves were committed east of the Canal. Bar-Lev waited and watched. Unknowingly, Sadat complied.

Defeating the strategic reserve of the Egyptian army set the conditions for the IDF to launch its canal crossing and begin its encirclement of the Third Egyptian Army. Again the evidence points to the importance the Israelis placed on aligning tactical engagements with strategic goals. With the Syrians in full retreat in the north, Israel would still not have achieved success if it had allowed the Suez to remain under Egyptian control. If Israel could not destroy the bridgeheads, then it could seize ground on the west side and thus neutralize Egyptian territorial gains. Eventually, Israel hoped to trade its gains west of the Suez for the complete return of the Sinai. "In practice, the Israelis see that the object of military force is to ensure that the enemy loses territory which can be traded for a political settlement".<sup>70</sup>

#### IV

#### CONCLUSION

The 1973 Yom Kippur War presents a study of the military and political restraints that characterize limited war. Further, this conflict provides the

operational planner an example of how policy influences military operations. Clausewitz underscored the importance of this relationship when he wrote: "If war is part of policy, policy will determine its climate....Political considerations...are the more influential in the planning of war, of the campaign, and often even the battle".<sup>74</sup>

Both opponents' campaign plans reflected their desire to gain, through military action, sufficient leverage to achieve a political settlement. The Arab end state involved retaking territory lost in the 1967 War and forcing Israel into a war of attrition. Conversely, Israel's end state was a return to the status quo. Accomplishing this end, however, required Israel to gain air superiority, fight each front separately, and neutralize Arab territorial gains. Israel was able to achieve these military objectives, partly because neither Syria nor Egypt executed one integrated campaign plan. Both fought in relatively independent theaters of operation. Seizing the Golan Heights and the east bank of the Suez became their only concern.

This Arab decision focused on holding terrain instead of using their combined military strengths to defeat the IDF. This concept was in stark contrast to Israel's two stage strategy that combined gaining ground for negotiations and destroying enemy forces. This difference in campaign design was evident in each opponents interpretation of centers of gravity, culminating points, and linkage of ends and means.

Both Syria and Egypt had designed operations that could achieve a satisfactory end state. This was possible if two conditions were met. First, both armies viewed their centers of gravity as being their large numbers of ground forces. Their purpose was defending these lodgements along the Golan Heights and on the east bank of the Suez. Second, they knew that their defense hinged on sustaining and protecting these forces from both Israeli

ground and air attacks. If their sustainment efforts were successful, then Israel would be forced into a war of attrition. The Arabs reasoned that the longer they held on, the sooner the IDF would culminate.

Initially, this strategy worked. Within the first twenty-four hours of battle the IDF found itself losing the war on both fronts. Israeli air power could not break through the Arab ADA screen. Further, IDF ground units were, at best, holding their own against massive enemy armor formations and sagger-bearing infantrymen.

What changed from a potential Arab victory to a defeat, was their failure to remain focused on the original defensive strategy. First, Syria failed to take the Golan Heights. The stripping away of its ADA protection allowed the IAF to return to its traditional close air support role in conjunction with Israeli ground forces. This combination soundly defeated the Syrian army. Egypt was then left to continue the fight alone. Presumably it could have succeeded if it had stayed with the original plan. However, Sadat broke the linkage by attempting an unsupported and unprotected armor attack by his strategic reserve. This act cost him the war.

Conversely, the Israelis designed a campaign that focused on the destruction of the enemy's source of strength. To accomplish this, each engagement that achieved victory set the conditions for the next engagement. The IDF never lost sight of the importance of this sequential relationship. Therefore, to beat the Syrians in the main battle area required key targets to be hit deep in the Syrian rear. This action forced a thinning of Syrian ADA sites on the front line and allowed the IDF to achieve local superiority.

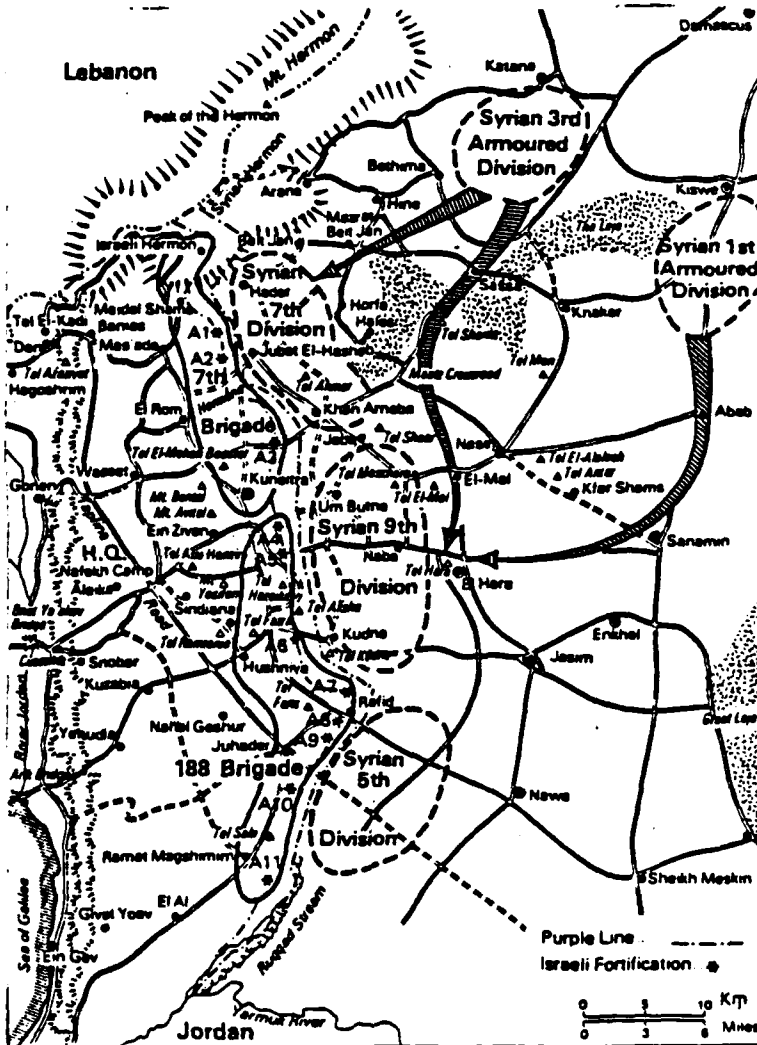
Likewise, in the Sinai, Israel realized it could not penetrate Egyptian bridgeheads from the east. A crossing to encircle the lodgements from the west bank was executed. Defeating the Egyptian strategic reserve became the first

step to achieving a successful crossing.

The result of this war suggests to the operational planner that victory is achieved by executing campaigns based on positive aims. Therefore, the only objective that can insure military success is the destruction of the enemy. The fatal flaw of both the Syrian and Egyptian war planners was the belief that protecting their territorial gains would render victory instead of destroying the Israeli Defense Forces. Israel, however, understood the effects of positive aims. It designed operations that linked a series of tactical victories which resulted in Israeli dominance on both the battlefield and in the peace negotiations that followed. Clausewitz sums up the importance of this concept when he wrote:

A major victory can only be obtained  
by positive measures aimed at a decision,  
never by simply waiting on events. In  
short, even in the defense, a major stake  
alone can bring a major gain.

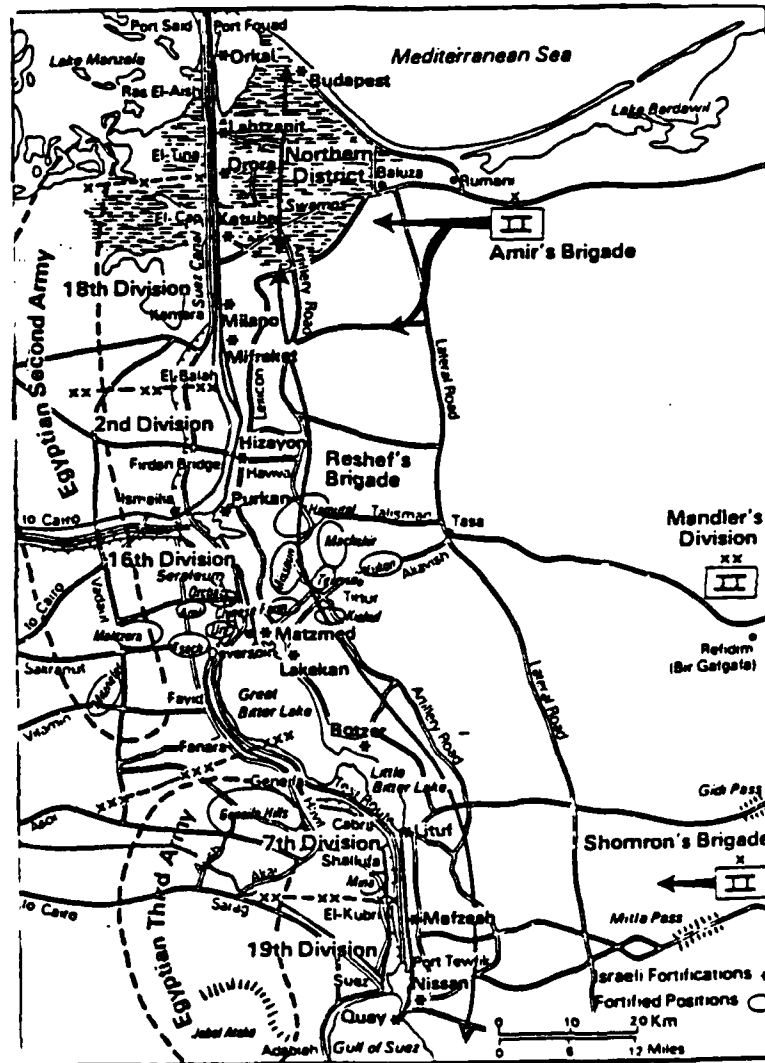
MAP 1.



**Deployment of Forces, 14.00 hours, Saturday 6 October 1973**

Source: The Arab-Israeli Wars by Chaim Herzog

MAP 2.

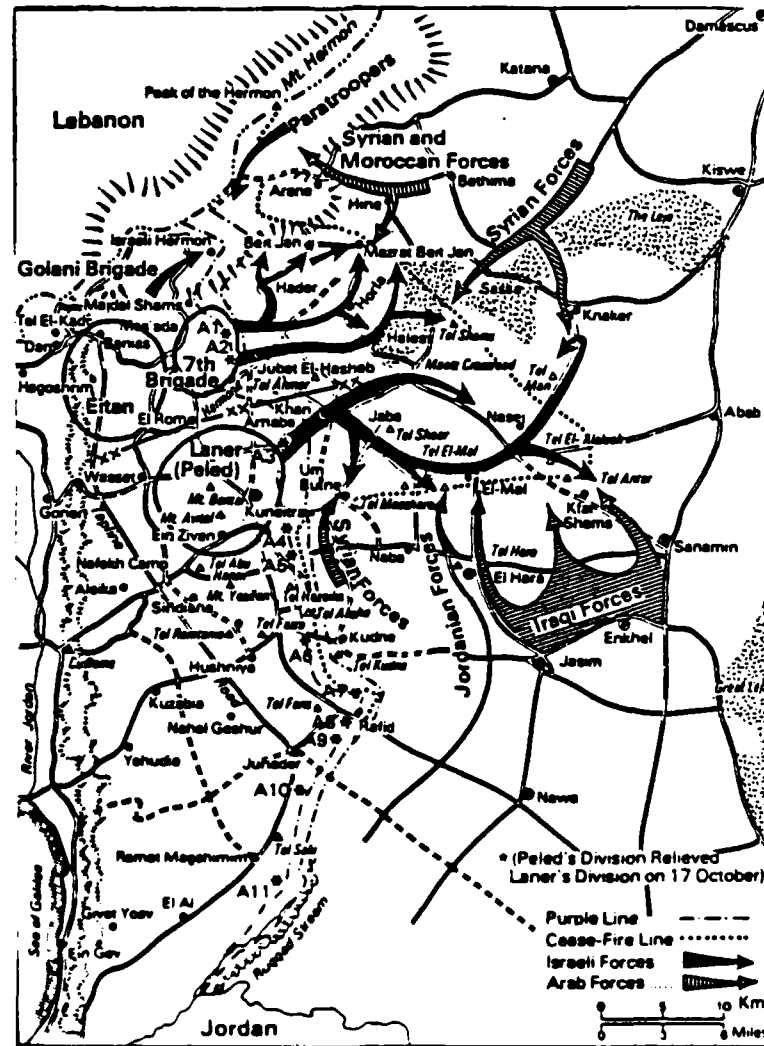


Deployment of Forces, 14.00 hours, Saturday 6 October 1973

Source: The Arab-Israeli Wars by Chaim Herzog



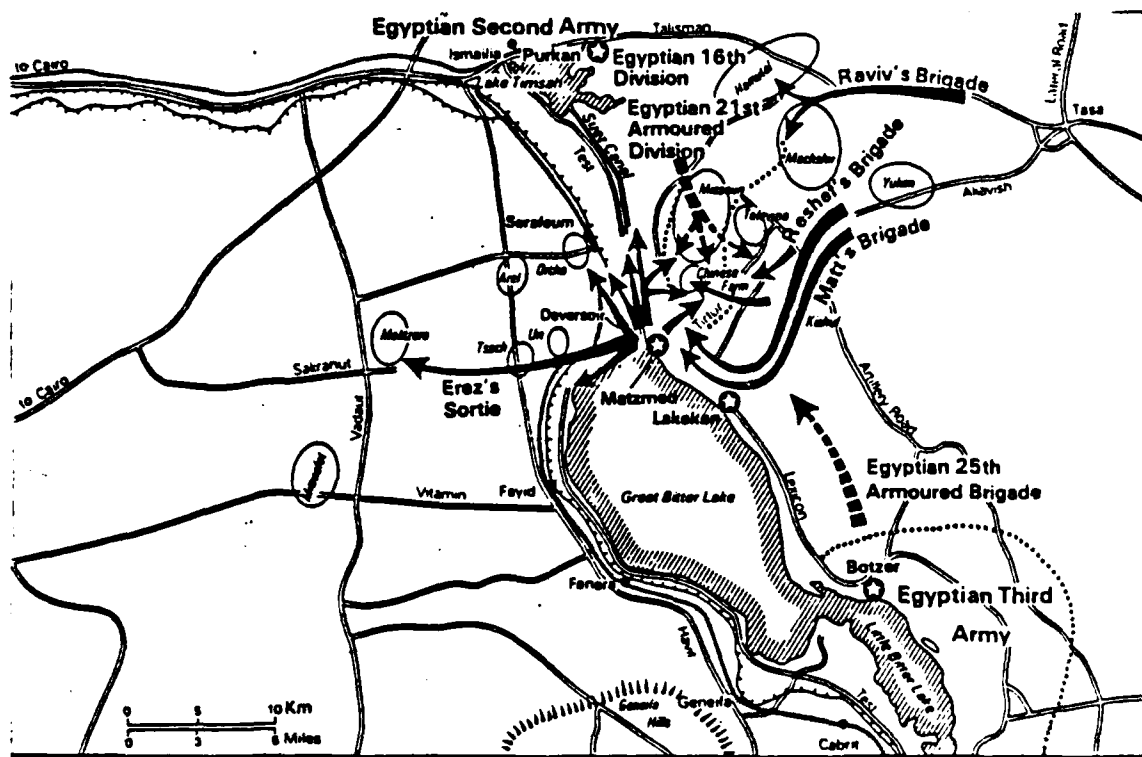
MAP 3.



The Breakthrough, 11 October 1973

Source: The Arab-Israeli Wars by Chaim Herzog

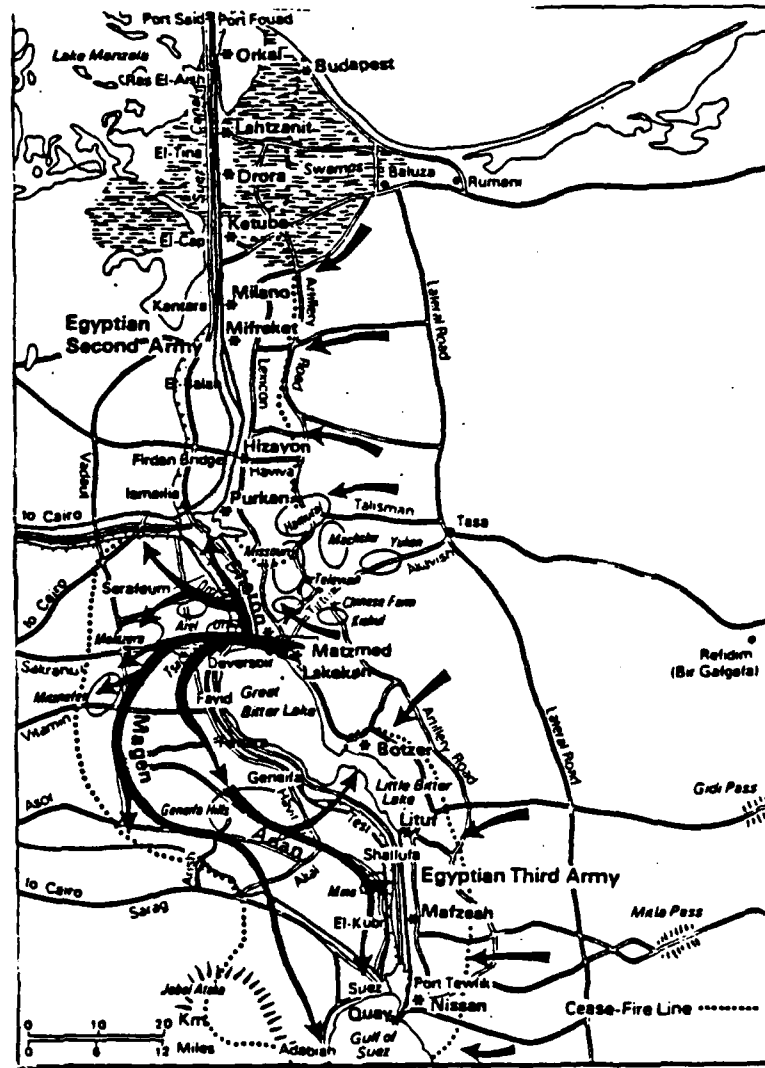
MAP 4.



The Israeli Crossing, 16 October 1973

Source: The Arab-Israeli Wars by Chaim Herzog

MAP 5.



Israeli Advance West of the Canal and Cease-Fire Line

Source: The Arab-Israeli Wars by Chaim Herzog

#### ENDNOTES

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